

NAMING THE HYBRIDS

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When it comes to properly identifying plants, many persons back away. The same problem occurs with the naming of *Nepenthes* hybrids. Many new *Nepenthes* hybrids are going unnamed due to the complexity of the rules established by the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature. Appendix I alone devotes five pages to the naming of hybrids, and the code sets rules in tedious detail in several hundred pages. When I talked with four different orchid growers who have crossed hybrids and named them, few knew more than me about the rules. The rules are international, yet are not used internationally; few persons know the laws and even fewer seem to practice them in the *Nepenthes* field. One now would think to consult with the Code book, but you would need a professional botanical taxonomist at your side as "the code is complex in areas and requires a kind of botanical lawyer," quotes Don Schnell.

About 140 years ago in Europe when Dominy made the first *Nepenthes* hybrid, he used the rules governing the naming of orchids at that time. Seedlings (called siblings) are named as a hybrid group, eg. *N. x dominii*. Later as plants matured, specific clones were labeled as varieties. Shortly after this time other *Nepenthes* nurseries made crosses such as *N. mirabilis* x *N. hookeriana*. Instead of naming the whole group they let the plants mature awhile, then gave hybrid variety names to them, then supposedly destroyed the other common, unnamed siblings, (as the Missouri Botanical Gardens did with the Pring cultivars.)

Today's rules and laws for hybrids go something like this: When two plants get crossed and registered, (different Genus, species or hybrids makes no difference) then T X C seedlings are all TC, always and forever. Now after they mature, you can pick out unusual clones and label them separately as varieties, such as TC var. A, B, C etc., usually with non-Latin names (example *N. x "Lt. Pring"*). A variety can only be reproduced by division. If you self-pollinate a variety (common in orchids) all its seeds are once again back to TC. Since the *Nepenthes* genus is dioecious (separate staminate and pistillate plants), this is, of course, impossible. If 200 years later you cross T x C or C x T you still get TC. New varieties can be added on later as more siblings mature and prove to be unusual.

These rules don't always seem to fit *Nepenthes* for some reason as T x C and C x T are not always the same. Reverse crosses in the past have been given different hybrid names, and when crossing an identical hybrid back to itself as in *oisoensis* x *oioensis* one somehow comes out with a new hybrid, *N. x koisoensis!*

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OLD CLONE, NEW HYBRID

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Today, in cultivation, an unusual female *Nepenthes* clone is going by the name of *N. curtisii* as well as *N. spectabilis* (not to be confused with the true Sumatran species). Where did it come from? What do we really know about it? Well, in 1883-84, on Curtis' second mission to Malaysia, he collected and sent home two species previously unknown. One was named after himself, *Nepenthes curtisii*, the other which was similar and supposed to be a variety of *N. curtisii* was later given specific rank as a species by Dr. Masters who described it to be *N. stenophylla*. Later, Danser wrote that *N. curtisii* was simply a form of *N. maxima*, to which I do not agree at all. Almost everyone then, as well as today, fail to notice, both in upper and lower pitchers, when they first open, a clear, well-defined, solid white band that encircles the peristome. As the peristome matures it folds down over the white band,

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The rules are constantly being pushed aside and ignored. In 1895, Taplin crossed *N. rafflesiana* with *N. mirabilis* and named it *N. x hookereae*. This hybrid name (even if the plant goes extinct) according to the rules must be used for ALL similar crosses, yet a recent Japanese cross of reverse parentage (*N. mirabilis* x *N. rafflesiana*) bears the hybrid name of *N. x nagamogo!* Other identical crosses have yet different names as *N. x rokko*, *N. x balmy koto*, and *N. x masamiae* are all *N. maxima* crosses. Many new hybrids are remakes or reverses of old Victorian crosses.

Keep in mind that when writing down the equation for describing a hybrid, the pistillate (female) plant comes first followed by the staminate (male) plant. Hence in (*mirabilis* x *hookeriana*) the *mirabilis* is the female and the *hookeriana* the male.

The rules do manage to stay true to the named natural hybrid complexes which are capable of backcrossing and stabilizing populations long after parent plants have disappeared, (*hookeriana*, *trichocarpa*, *harryana*, *merrilliana*, *trusmadiensis* and *kinabaluensis*). Many natural hybrid complexes are given horticultural designations regardless of backcrossing or variation.

References

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D. Schnell, letter to/from Oct. 1985

Interviews with four orchid breeders in Florida, June-Dec. 1985.

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completely hiding it. This, as well as the fine hairy texture to the leaves, seem to indicate that the plant is a natural hybrid between *N. maxima* and *N. albo-marginata*. No plants resembling this clone have ever again been found, indicating it was scarce then. Perhaps it was one of a few hybrids maintaining a small population now extinct. Since *N. albo-marginata* and *N. maxima* rarely share the same local, this natural hybrid has not been found again and a good example of this situation is *N. x cincta*. *Nepenthes x cincta* was a natural hybrid between *N. northiana* and *N. albo-marginata* found only once, and now extinct from cultivation.

To make things worse, Witte, Curator of Leiden Gardens, crossed in 1897 the two plants that Curtis had sent back. By then the two plants were considered *N. maxima* (*curtisii*) and *N. stenophylla*. The cross gave rise to the hybrid *N. x wittei*. *Nepenthes x wittei* has the pitchers of *N. curtisii*, including the white band hidden by the large peristome, and the brittle foliage of our familiar *Nepenthes stenophylla*. All things taken into account, I believe our mystery plant of *N. curtisii*, *N. spectabilis*, *N. maxima* 'Superba' really to be the natural hybrid *N. x curtisii* (*N. maxima* x *N. albo-marginata*) and *N. x wittei* is *N. x curtisii* x *N. stenophylla*.

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